



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service (EAS)

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource— Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. My employee says she is bored with her job. She comes to work late, she doesn't complete assignments, and says she doesn't have the energy to be the performer she used to be. I can't refer her to the EAP for boredom, can I?

A. You can't refer your employee to the EAP for boredom because it is not a measurable performance problem, but you can refer her for attendance, incomplete assignments, and unsatisfactory performance. It is a misstep in managing a troubled employee to accept at face value the employee's self-diagnosis ("I'm bored") because there is no way to confirm it, and it can leave you feeling at a loss about what to do. Your employee might be bored, but she could also have other problems she would rather keep private. Many other issues may contribute to what appears to be boredom. Your EAP referral would be based upon her declining job performance, the missed assignments and coming in late. You can ask what she needs from you to feel more enthusiastic about work, but don't accept a lower standard of performance because of boredom.

■ Q. Two groups of employees in our organization are in ongoing conflict. The negative impact on productivity is very clear. I know the EAP works with individual employees, and coworkers in conflict, but what about larger "inter-group" conflict?

A. This is a good time to talk to your Employee Assistance Professional. Conflict is sometimes a result of unclear expectations or standards. If standards have been set and clearly stated, are issues being addressed consistently with measures to correct deficient performance or behavior? After preliminary assessment, your EA Professional may refer you to other resources you may need to tap into with the state system. It is essential that a stop is put to such ongoing conflict.

■ Q. My employee is a good worker, but he's a "clock-watcher." He always leaves on time. His behavior has a negative impact on morale because other employees must pitch in and take care of unpredictable work demands. Is there a way to intervene?

A. If your employee watches the clock, there may be a number of explanations or special needs that, if known, you may determine to be reasonable. Addressing your concerns with the employee may help you to accommodate these needs in a way that has less negative impact on the entire staff. This may be a good time to assess your meetings. Do your meetings run too long without a break? Starting and ending a meeting on time and providing sufficient breaks allow people to know what to expect so they can best manage their own needs. It may also be important to clarify that, as adults, if we need a short break, it is appropriate to leave and come right back to the meeting. Encouraging all staff to take breaks can provide needed respite from hectic schedules. Missing breaks can lead to burnout, while taking breaks can actually help employees be more effective and efficient.

■ Q. My employee says services to which she was referred by the EAP are too far away from home. Her performance has not improved since I referred her to the EAP. Is it fair to use discipline or accept less from her if she can't get help for her personal problems?

A. It is unfortunate that your employee cannot obtain the services she needs where she resides, but her performance problems can't be excused because of it. If this were the case, she could eventually become unqualified for her position. It is your employee's responsibility to perform satisfactorily. It is more likely that your employee has not informed the EAP that services are too far away, or her motivation to accept help has waned. Recommend that she meet with the EAP again to solve the problem of her inability to access needed services. It is unlikely an EAP would accept the inability to help an employee. It would find a creative solution before it allowed an employee's personal problem to grow worse.

■ Q. My employee says she has distracting personal problems that cause her to be irritable to front office customers. I was about to make a supervisor referral when she shared this information, and said she had an appointment with the EAP. Should I hold off, or make the referral?

A. Your decision should be based on how important it is to your organization that your employee improves her unacceptable job performance behavior. Although you could wait, the stronger argument is to make the supervisor referral now. Your employee says she has an appointment, but you cannot confirm when, if she will keep it, or if she will tell the EAP about her performance problems. The EAP needs to know about the performance problems you have observed to make a correct assessment of her personal problems. If you do not make a supervisor referral, will you take disciplinary action if your employee demonstrates inappropriate behavior again? Or, will you make a supervisor referral as originally planned, giving her another chance? These issues suggest that a supervisor referral is a proactive approach to helping your employee improve her performance and it shouldn't wait.

---

**NOTES:**

Visit EAS on our website at:  
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

